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GAINING A VOICE

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*Máster Universitario en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato,
Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas, Artísticas y Deportivas*

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1-INTRODUCTION

To be honest, I did not intend to take this Master's degree at first. I studied Joyce at university; how could anyone ever imagine my descending from my golden pedestal and my coming down to the humane domains of the ordinary secondary school?. I procrastinated the decision of enrolling this course for two years. Now that I am in the later stages of this course I can safely say that it has been a tough but rewarding experience for me. As a philologist, I have been given the opportunity to write, read, reflect, philosophize, create, discuss, design, analyze, assess, evaluate, construct and later deconstruct etc... For the first time since I can remember this learning process has been done in an autonomous way which demands double the intellectual effort but in exchange it provides double the personal reward. At the beginning of the year I had the impression, as many of my partners did, that I was being thrown to the lions. Those lions were nothing more than autonomous work and critical sense in learning. Unfortunately we were not used to that sort of academic discipline that will ultimately lay the foundations for our prospective job. I would like to thank my teachers and the institutions that created and managed this course because on the one hand it has allowed me to grasp the responsibility that being a teacher entails and on the other hand I have learnt that teaching others is a social commitment to which I would like to devote my life. Thanks to this Master and its teachers, I am a better philologist now and I am on the surest path to become a good teacher.

I would like to thank my tutor at my school placement because I have learnt a lot from her. She has been genuinely generous to me and I could never be grateful enough to her and to the other members of the staff of Miralbueno secondary school. From my tutor I learnt that it is possible to be a teacher for about 30 years and still feel and live the passion of teaching. My Practicum stays have provided me with the most enlightening learning experience. During our **training period** my partners and I were gladly allowed to witness assessment boards, teachers' meetings, school board assemblies, management team reunions as well as many and varied classes. We were hosted to the vocational training workshops, to real scale hotel rooms and reception of

the Tourism vocational field, to a restaurant kitchen where work behind the scenes was taking place etc...We had access to the invisible mechanisms that rule the secondary school life. We all felt completely at home since the very first day when we were treated to a selection of artisan and home baked pastry made by the students from the culinary branch at school. I will always feel in debt to the Miralbueno students and staff for all that I have received. Nevertheless as a Master's student I have been requested to put into practice my critical sense even at the risk of sounding ungrateful. My dissertation about my learning in this Master course is meant to be critical with an educational system which seems not to work effectively enough so as to develop its students potentialities.

The fundamental **aim of this Master's syllabus** is to provide the teachers with the required pedagogical and didactic formation that enables graduate students to teach English as a second language. Nevertheless completing this Master's degree allows the teachers-to-be to reflect on the very essence of their future profession. This is the most significant learning for me from this course. A constantly-changing society demands from teachers the ability to adapt to the new teaching environment, the courage to accept its challenges and the willingness to be useful to its members. That is what I regard as being our task and that is what I now feel committed to.

In the course of this year we have reflected on the value of the teaching profession and we have learnt about the relevance of the social and familial context in the learning process where educators have to become active agents. We have also learnt about the importance of promoting an engaging climate in the classroom that fosters both academic and personal development of the students. Teachers must be respectful towards the social, psychological and familial backgrounds of their students so as to achieve harmony in the classroom. As prospective teachers we should become competent at fostering and developing an autonomous learning process in students that contributes to the enhancement of their critical sense. The use of the most relevant didactic and pedagogical theories has been a steady maxim in this master course which has entitled us to plan, design and develop a learning program. Besides, this master

course has instructed us on the implementation of the concepts of assessment, research and innovation of the learning process on the pursue of the constant development of the teaching performance. In my opinion the basis of this Master's Degree structure revolves around solid and humanist pedagogical principles aiming at the development of the personal and professional competences of the future teachers. This principles are conveniently cited in the Master's Memorandum and define a professional in continuous learning who is able not only to facilitate knowledge but also to actively participate in the academic and social context of the secondary school.

This Master Course has proved both a grueling and rewarding experience for me. The contents of this Master entailed a new field of study for me which required a tremendous effort on my part. Moreover, I must admit I was quite skeptical about the usefulness and practicality of these studies, especially when almost nothing related with Didactics had been dealt with during our degree at university. In my view it remains striking that one of the main professional paths of our degree in Philology has been overridden by the academic curriculum at university. Fortunately this Master's Degree succeeded in equipping the prospective teachers with the capacities and skills necessary to get initiated in the profession. Consequently it should be recommended not only to everyone who wants to become an educator but also to those who already exercise the teaching profession. The specialized nature of this course enables the teachers-to-be to revisit the concept of the pedagogical work and offers a glimpse of how engaging and thrilling this profession can be. I dare say I have developed both professionally and personally during the carrying out of this course. On the professional level, I have been provided with many and useful tools to be applied in the classroom at the service of the students. On the personal level, I take the most rewarding experience of all, which means becoming aware of the precious value of vocation in teaching. This Master course allowed me to discover a vocation that was not clear for me before; I feel I have found the professional path along which I want to guide my future steps, and that is priceless.

During the first semester of this Master course and specifically in Modules 1, 3, 4 we became acquainted with the legal and institutional framework that rules our educational system. These Modules comprised the subjects: **Teaching Context, Teaching-learning Processes and Curricular Design and Fundamentals of Instructional Design and Practicum I**, the latter meaning our first incursion in the teaching field. In my view it is quite an arid territory for a philologist; there is only one possible interpretation for rules and laws and its linguistic legal code was quite alien for me. Still I acknowledge that the political and administrative context must be both known and understood by the future teachers of the public school. Words such as Royal Decree, Act or amendment started to have meaning for us. Moreover, the internal structures and mechanisms that operate in our educational system were also unveiled displaying a profuse corpus of acronyms such as *PEC*, *PAB*, *PGA*, etc... difficult to translate at the beginning. This academic semester covered the essential components of pedagogical management such as curriculum, teaching learning approaches, learning achievements, teaching performance, teaching-learning materials, educational research, ICTs, attention to students with special needs etc...On the other hand, it was quite arduous to accept the almost scientific discipline of a syllabus and the gradual design of the activities for a lesson where the main skills should be implemented and the main competences targeted. I did enjoy the lectures of Module 2 (**Interaction and Coexistence in the Classroom**), in which we studied the psychological and sociological interstices of our future teaching scenario. Education and its backup institutions were tackled from a sociological perspective and this allowed a certain degree of critical thought and discussion that I could savor. This part of the module was very appealing and rewarding for me. Teachers, in my view, need to develop a critical approach towards their profession so as to be able to cope with the challenges of a constantly changing society in which they cannot remain neutral as Dewey, Freire and many other pedagogues assert. These sociological lectures on education in history gave me the basis for the development of an ethical scaffolding for my future profession that I understand as a sort of social commitment. My elective subject in this semester was **Emotional Education for Teachers**. Our lecturer was a psychologist in the constant exercise of her profession who convinced us of the virtues of building a healthy

mental equilibrium for our future job. This semester and my first Practicum allowed me to reflect on the main differences between philologists and teachers. The critical sense of the former remains on papers and theories for experts whereas that critical sense of the latter is lived out in the classroom.

The first semester had a more theoretical value in comparison with the subjects comprised in the second half of our Master. In fact we accomplished many and diverse assignments for the first semester. But the subjects of **Oral Communication, Design and Development of Learning Activities for the English classroom** together with **Evaluation, Innovation and Educational Research** made a quantum leap forward for the development of our teaching skills. Nevertheless it is when you have to practice what you preach that real and challenging practice begins. And the empirical part of the Master took place during **Practicum II and III**, which meant for me a real battlefield. At the beginning of this second semester I approached the lectures previous to the training at school with a certain degree of skepticism because I could not imagine the English class without placing grammar at its centre. We were faced with new pedagogical methods that put in question all we had learnt before about the teaching performance. Besides those classes were very demanding for us as students since we were required a degree of participation to which we were not used. It was also difficult to make the most of this learning because both Practicums and classes lack the appropriate equilibrium and tempo. In my view we had too few classes on **Design and Development of Learning Activities and on Evaluation and Innovation and Educational Research before starting the Practicum II**. In this sense, we just could catch a glimpse of the communicative language teaching or of the task-based learning process by then. Consequently the implementation of our learning unit had more to do with intuition than with expertise.

This Master's Degree has let us know the fundamental pedagogical decalogue: the Curriculum of Aragon. In my view, this legal framework allows teachers freedom of movements and thoughts. Kumaravadivelu (2012) recommends teachers interested in achieving autonomy and making decisions on their educational contexts going and

taking their liberty. This liberty, he affirms, is not something that can be given but something that is taken. I adhere firmly to his concept of teaching when he advises:

...deviate from the pre-determined syllabus and prescribed textbook and follow your heart, do what you really want to do in order to render your teaching truly meaningful and truly transformative. (Kumaradivelu, 2012: 103).

And that is what I would like to do in both my personal and professional life.

2-JUSTIFICATION OF THE SELECTION OF WORKS

The works that compound the basis for my dissertation on the teaching and learning process in the Aragonese classroom, are on the one hand my **Research Project** accomplished for the subject *Teaching Evaluation and Innovation and Educational Research* and on the other hand, my **Learning Unit of Work** together with my final **Essay**, both assignments of the subject of *Design and Development of Learning Activities for the English Classroom*.

These works share the same philosophy I developed along the academic year. In my opinion, giving words to the students should be the guiding principle of any methodology implemented in the English classroom. Students lack a voice of their own in the secondary school and the English class could be the perfect place where to regain their voices and freely speak to the world. But unfortunately my thesis seems to assert rather the contrary: some foreign language classes are not spaces where positive relationships and real communication among its members are fostered. In other words, some English classes are still non-places, as my final essay states. Consequently the language spoken in such an English class is a non-language, just a constraining, restrictive code.

This dissertation is the product of my personal reflections on my training period and is not intended to be a binding relation of what is happening in the English class at the

Aragonese public school. My reflections are just the result of my observation of a limited number of English classes in my school placement. In the course of this Master we have been instructed in the desirability of the implementation of certain pedagogical maxims in the English class that I shall now refer to: teachers should foster class-spirit in the classroom, interests of the students should be diligently met, emotional and cognitive development must coexist in the learning process, positive reinforcement enhances learning, mistakes are just the threshold of discovery, autonomy and responsibility when granted to the students entail a sure path to knowledge, etc... Besides, as prospective teachers we should aim at the competences referred to in the Aragonese Curriculum, as well as be observant to the orientations of the Common European Framework of Reference. Nevertheless, the reality of many of the English classes in secondary school does not accurately conform to the prerogatives outlined above and this is what my dissertation focuses on.

My **Research Project** together with my **Learning Unit** and my **final Essay** talk about the need for a real change in the teaching of English in the public school. As I will later report, the students' level of performance in English justified the official reports claiming for a change in teaching. The Estudio Europeo de Competencia Lingüística (EECL) states that Spanish students are at the bottom of the European ladder regarding proficiency in English. The results of this report conclude that 63% of ESO students are not proficient at listening comprehension at the end of ESO. These recent European studies, carried out in June 2012, seem to claim that a change is needed in our educational system. This Master has also given me the opportunity to study the legal parameters of our educational system. In my opinion the Aragonese Curriculum, the legal framework which rules education in Aragon, allows the flexibility for the implementation of new methodologies and encourages the development of a teaching philosophy that gives a prominent role to the intellectual and personal fulfillment of learners. The foreign languages section of the Curriculum establishes:

The learning of a foreign language opens the possibility for the students to better understand their reality, to receive a comprehensive education, to get in touch with members of other countries, to enrich their cultural world, to favour the development of attitudes of respect and flexibility as

well as to contribute to the development of affective, social and cognitive aspects of their personalities. (The Aragonese Curriculum, 200)

Nevertheless, as I have said earlier, the didactic orientations of the Curriculum are not entirely being applied in the English class. This results in a sort of stagnation and routine as far as methodology and teaching performance are concerned. Both teachers and students suffer equally the consequences of this stagnation. The former, while remaining in their comfort zone, are in some measure aware that their efforts are not obtaining the expected outcomes whereas the latter feel the frustration of not being able to express themselves in a mature and personal way in the Shakespeare tongue in spite of all the grammar learnt and all the words stored in their memories. In sum, the humanist philosophy that the Aragonese Curriculum advocates seems to be barely on its way to become a reality.

3- CRITICAL REFLEXION ON THE SELECTED WORKS

My school placement served as testing field for both my **Research Project** and my **Learning Unit of Work**. My training period took place in the IES Miralbueno, whose educational family is composed of almost one thousand students and one hundred teachers. The Bachelor Degree classes are merely testimonial whereas the Vocational Training courses attract a large and diverse student body coming from different districts and villages from the region. Immigrant pupils constitute an important percentage of students, especially in the ESO and Vocational Training courses in the IES Miralbueno, which might very well be a lively example of the social panorama of our days.

My **Learning Unit of Work** was addressed to a heterogeneous group of 24 students belonging to the first year of the Vocational Training Superior Courses in Travel Agencies and Events Management. It goes without saying that my knowledge about these professional courses was scarce due in part to the lesser attention given to this field in our Master itinerary. In my view there is also a snobbish conception of Vocational Training in our society; it is conceived as a second-class educational field

addressed to those less %academic+ students who will better adjust to the blue collar sector. My tutor during my training period happened to be also the teacher of English for this class. She allowed me to attend her classes during my first training stay at the school placement. What I liked most about her pedagogical philosophy was that she conceived the academic course as an integrated whole in which the acquired knowledge should be meaningfully connected. She followed the didactic orientations included in both the Common European Framework of Reference and the Aragonese Curriculum. In this way each lesson formed part of a coherent semantic domain. For instance during the first trimester they had been dealing with European capitals and tourist destinations, during the second one the main topic had been cruises. Finally flights and airports would be the context structuring the contents of the third trimester. My tutor suggested that the classes I should give could have this topic as semantic framework. In this way a novice teacher afraid of flying started to design her first learning unit of work.

My classes would be targeted at 24 adults whose academic and social backgrounds differed quite a lot. Most of them were between 20 and 26 years of age with the exception of a student who was 50. Some of these learners came from Vocational Training Medium Courses, some others, even with an incomplete itinerary in the ESO, had just passed the access exam to enrol the superior vocational courses, and finally the third sector of my %guinea pigs+ were those who came from Bachillerato and who had passed the Selectividad exam. In this respect, it was striking to know, for instance, some engineers that have enrolled courses in hotel catering and cookery in an attempt to find a new career opportunity in times of economic crisis. It can be inferred that the very idiosyncrasy of the class and a medium-low level of English of almost all its students required a great effort as far as creativity and %professional pride+ were concerned. To make things worse my tutor let me know that this vocational course was not the first option but a second-rate one for many of these students. This meant that the use of specific English for tourism would be of no interest for many of them. During my first training period I attended their classes as a neutral and passive observer. I came to the conclusion that the only thing that seemed to wake them up from their sort

of silent lethargy was the use of the ICTs. In fact my partners and I had witnessed some lively classes in which these students made effective oral presentations with the providential help of modern technology. I thought they felt safer and more self-assured under the protection of these technological gadgets. More important though, was that this love of modern technology was shared by everyone in such a varied and non cohesive human group. After this short period of observation, the diagnosis of the class was clear to me: it was a class of dormants; there was neither real communication nor interaction in a classroom whose students seemed to melt into their desks as chameleons when asked to intervene in class. As prospective travel agents or events managers they should be quite fluent in English or at least they should be willing to communicate in the shakespearean language when required. Years of passivity in the ESO English class might be the cause for their lack of proactivity. In principle their lack of motivation seemed to hamper the future implementation of my shiny new knowledge compiled in the form of my **Learning Unit** of Work. Apart from this more than apparent absence of motivation, class spirit was lacking too, which would make even harder any prospective attempts for real communication in the classroom.

My logical question was: how did we reach this point?. After years of study of English as a mandatory subject at school, most of these students were not able to express themselves in a mature way. Their speeches were absolutely empty: they were not able to structure a written or oral speech about their professional field or about themselves. These adults did not have a voice of their own, at least in English. I understood that my **Research Project** could give me an answer to that question. This research study entitled: *The Curriculum: That Big Unknown*, consisted of a register of our observations in many and varied English classes belonging to different years of the ESO, Bachillerato and Vocational Training. This stage of our project allowed us to obtain a quite diaphanous panorama of the state of affairs of the teaching of English in this secondary school. The statistic body of our research was based mainly on the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from a questionnaire answered by 115 ESO students and by a small sample of pupils of Vocational Training. Afterwards we devised a different set of questions to be answered by some of the English teachers of

the centre. This last stage was suggested by our project tutor, who thought it could offer a different and convenient perspective to our investigation.

Our observations for our research project revealed that many of the English classes are still teacher-centered. The questionnaire addressed to the students tried to find out whether the Curriculum orientations were being followed in the secondary school; in our consensual opinion, this would imply that the English classes began to adopt a **student-centered philosophy**. Every question addressed in this questionnaire referred to some of the didactic orientations of the Curriculum that we considered more relevant for our study. Basically, we aimed at getting information on whether the interests of the students were being met and whether their emotional dimension was being nurtured in the classroom.

The arrangement of the physical space in these classrooms seemed to claim this centrality of the teacher's figure. In all the classes attended the main and unquestionable figure was the teacher. Her table was bigger than the uncomfortable desks of the students; teacher and students faced each other, which seems to portray a sort of confrontation between two well-defined factions of the class. The one who has the dominant position is still the educator, who normally stands still adopting a power stance when addressing the students. All the classrooms we visited had this straight row traditional arrangement of desks, what Rosenfeld and Civikaly define as "something like tombstones in a military cemetery" (1976: 161). This setting is not conducive to interaction among its members. We did not see modular or horseshoe dispositions of the seating arrangement or an original or democratically elected disposition of the classroom.

The Aragonese Curriculum establishes that the **students' autonomy and responsibility** in the process of learning must be developed in the English classroom but still the teacher is the one who dictates what, how and when to do something. Students do not choose what to study, how to study and when to do it. As I have reported before, the students of the superior course of vocational training surprised us

in our first period of the first Practicum with some lively oral presentations about different European capitals. With the help of the ICTs they performed quite well in English and did a creative work choosing alternative routes different to the mainstream guides for tourists. In one of those presentations they transformed the classroom space into an elegant restaurant and they delighted us with delicious desserts made by them, with a rose artistically made of paper and with some other handmade presents for the guests. These oral presentations seemed to do justice to the first general methodological point of the Aragonese Curriculum that advocates for a student's active role in the learning process.

Unfortunately this was just a mirage. When the traditional method reigned again in the class they relapsed into their prior stance. It was clear for us that they went back to a passive and infertile position when they felt far from the support of their loved ICTs. They seemed to be still further from an autonomous way of working in which they were the only responsible for the success or failure of the final cooperative project. They definitely needed to regain their autonomy and responsibility; As Barbara McCombs (2012:1) points out:

Research has shown that motivation is related to whether or not students have opportunities to be autonomous and to make important academic choices. Having choices allows children to feel that they have control or ownership over their own learning. This, in turn, helps them develop a sense of responsibility and self-motivation. When students feel a sense of ownership, they **want** to engage in academic tasks and persist in learning.

My students were grown-ups that after years of study of English talked like children. They had not been given any degree of responsibility or autonomy to develop their own language in the previous ESO stages. Autonomy is one of the pillars of the learning process because it provides the learner with a valuable auto-input, as Rod Ellis (2005) says. In my opinion this was the main cause for their passivity in class. Certainly their knowledge of the language consisted of grammar rules and vocabulary hidden under many layers of insecurity and frustration. Their oral skills had scarcely developed during the secondary education years and they found it really hard to deal with the topics

related to their future profession in English. But these learners performed much better when they were given the chance to work in an autonomous way when presenting their powerpoint works on European capitals. Then I could confirm that this way of autarchy in learning works well, especially for grownup students. They felt more motivated when allowed to work in an independent way. In my experience, our educational system seems to persist in the consuetudinary teacher-centered classes where there is only a mature and adult figure, that of the educator. The rest of the members of the classroom are treated like children regardless their age. No wonder then that these adults lack the motivation needed for a language that only allows them to express like kids. These classes should be a chance for mutual commitment among adults for the achievement of learning goals and an opportunity for fun. Students of any level should be active agents of their own knowledge as the new methodological approaches assert; this would result in more fertile outcomes for both teachers and learners.

I decided to prove the thesis that these students would perform better when directly appealed as adults and when given a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility. According to Arnold (2012) creating spaces for voluntarily sharing their interests, worries and feelings promotes a stronger self-esteem in the students which leads to an effective learning. Literally following this pedagogical orientation I designed a sort of campaign called: **Í Confessions in EnglishÎ** which was included in my **Learning Unit of Work**. They just had to put their names on a paper to voluntarily participate in my didactic experiment. Its mere title **Í Confessions in EnglishÎ** pursued to stimulate their willingness to personal communication and interaction. I took them far beyond the limits of the school building to prove whether they could act in a different way in such an alternative context. At the beginning, they showed certain reluctance to subscribe to my initiative; finally we went to the cafeteria; I maintained individual interviews with many of them, though. I must admit that they performed much better in these personal encounters than in the **conventional English classes**. I was surprised to prove that they seemed quite relaxed and happy during the interviews. In fact, they seemed to enjoy answering my personal questions about their interests, lives, future plans, etc...I tried to make it evident that I had a genuine interest in them, not only as students but as

persons. And in my view they enjoyed talking freely about themselves; they admitted feeling proud of being able to maintain a conversation in English after; that was very rewarding to me. To my surprise, that was the first true interactive experience ever in their academic lives, as they later reported. At the end of their interviews they used to ask whether they could meet me again for another English chat. The genuine interest and enjoyment they showed meant a prize to me.

Their eagerness to communicate was more than evident in such a meaningful context (the cafeteria outdoors). According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990) the concept of %willingness to communicate+refers to a personality-based predisposition dependent on factors such as introversion, self-esteem, communicative competence, communication apprehension and cultural diversity. High willingness to communicate is associated with increased frequency and amount of communication and positive outcomes, whereas low willingness is related to decreased frequency and amount of communication and negative outcomes. Better communication outcomes could be expected if those factors that favor the students' disposition to communicate were implemented in the public school. The simple alteration of the teaching scenario and the selection of an appealing topic resulted in a meaningful interactive exercise in English that increased their self-esteem, as they later let me know. As a future educator I took the most valuable teaching from these informal encounters: I could find some talented students who, with the appropriate encouragement and motivation, could achieve the proficiency in English that the educational system and its evaluation grades seemed to deny them. For me it was like finding a long hidden treasure. Of course I congratulated all the students making special emphasis on what I considered their potential abilities. The learning-teaching process is dialectical: there must be feedback on the part of teachers otherwise this process becomes unilateral and thus incomplete. An educational system unable to discover, support and cultivate its students' capabilities is not working in the right direction and, worst of all, is not being fair to its own members. Or, as Dewey says: an educational system should be able to train its members to %have the full and ready use of all their capacities+(1897, 6). Dewey's theories focused on the realization of the students' full potential; teachers, according to Dewey, should help their students to find

out those potentialities. I concluded these learners needed to be personally addressed as adults and they should be given a greater degree of autonomy and responsibility in the learning process which is one of the general objectives of the curriculum:

...to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and self-confidence, participation, critical sense, personal initiative and capacity to learn, to plan, to make decisions, to be able to overcome difficulties and to assume responsibilities taking into account their own capabilities, needs and interests (my translation) (Aragonese Curriculum : 8).

I could not implement this experiment with teenagers in lower courses but I think they also need to be addressed in a less patronizing way. They should be given a greater degree of autonomy and this would lead to a greater engagement in the subject.

My works also talk about the students' lack of motivation. I think this absence of motivation implies they do not **get emotionally involved in the English class**. Probably because they have put their efforts in a subject that has given them almost nothing in return. Freire (1970) states language should be more than idle chatter, verbalism and alienated and alienating blah. Grammar is still the center of English teaching. In fact, almost every class we attended was structured around some morphosyntactic aspect of the language. It seems contrary to what the Curriculum asserts; that is to say, the morphosyntactic competence is given a position of relevance with respect to the rest of the aptitudinal counterparts outlined in the curriculum : pragmatic, procedural and intercultural competences (Aragonese Curriculum, 200). I do support Jane Arnold's (1998:240) conception of the teaching of languages:

Merely learning words and structures in isolation from the framework necessary to put them to effective use is not empowering learners to be able to function successfully in the language.

The oral skills are not developed in these classes. According to my experience in many of the classes in my school placement, there are not fluent dialogues, neither is there real interaction among the students and the teacher. As a matter of fact, learners' oral performance is strictly limited to some trite dialogues and some clichéd role-plays

usually extracted from the textbook. Grammar rules, while only conventionally put into practice on paper, will allow these students to pass the university access exam but they will not definitely provide them with the skills and competences required to start handling the language in a quite autonomous and rewarding way. Legutke and Thomas (cited in Kumaravadivelu, B. 2006, 62) state:

In spite of the trendy jargon in textbooks and teachers' manuals, very little is actually communicated in the L2 classroom. The way it is structured does not seem to stimulate the wish of learners to say something, nor does it tap what they might have to say.

The language talked and taught in the classroom should appeal to the students' interests and emotions. In my view, language without emotion becomes a non-language. Our **Research Project** investigation allowed us to come to the conclusion that those interests and emotions are not nurtured in some English classes. As a matter of fact, the European Framework of Reference for Languages explicitly acknowledges the importance of emotion in the language acquisition. The Common European Framework of Reference is built on previous contributions made by other international organizations such as UNESCO, whose 1996 report was called *Learning: the Treasure Within*. The very title of this work makes explicit reference to the holistic development of the individuals which involves not only cognitive aspects but also the social and emotional dimension. Following these humanist postulates, Arnold (2012) affirms that the cultivation of a fertile soil for emotion facilitates the students' engagement in the learning process. For the sake of scientific accuracy I would like to make reference to those scientific theories that pray that cognition and emotion are the two sides of the same coin. In this line Schuman says:

The brainstem, limbic and frontolimbic areas, which comprise the stimulus appraisal system, emotionally modulate cognition so that, in the brain, emotion and cognition are distinguishable but inseparable. Therefore, from a neural perspective, affect is an integral part of cognition. (Schumann, 1994: 232)

Functionalist and constructivist theories state that meaning is the starting point for learning. Arnold and Fonseca (2004) claim that *meaningfulness and engaging memory pathways* entail solid foundations for learning. Learners should be given meaningful contexts for learning and they should be allowed to build their own personal cognitive paths towards knowledge. Again, an emotional context leads to cognition. The grim truth is that the subjects supposedly dealt with in some classes are but mere semantic fields to explain grammar in a *logical way*. For instance, the teacher may resort to specific vocabulary on clothing and colours when explaining the Saxon Genitive in ESO years. For example: Valeria's skirt is green, Mateo's shirt is red... Who is Valeria and who is Mateo?. Would it not be the logical question to those statements if we accept the above mentioned theories on cognitive processes?. Learners should be given the appropriate contexts so that their emotions put into motion the cognitive part of their brains. In other words, the key aspect for the effective teaching seems to depend on the educators capability for raising the students' interest in Mateo and Valeria's lives and clothes. Teachers should be more creative so as to build a more fruitful context for imagination. I have indulged myself in the creation of playful examples such as the following: the educator might suggest their students imagining that Valeria is a ferocious green activist and after a row with the police in a demonstration for the Amazonian forest she has ended up rolling down a hill covered with fresh green grass. Now we know who Valeria is and now we understand the importance of the colour of her skirt. And the same could be applied to Mateo: he may be a conventional butcher in a quiet suburb or he may be living a double life transforming into a sly and shadowy serial killer by night. Now we know a little more about Mateo and we may infer why his shirt has this red colour. Needless to say that these are non politically correct examples to be avoided in the classroom. But the absence of emotion in the class of foreign language has, in my view, more damaging effects on children's learning process.

Many items of our **Research Project** questionnaire asked students about the topics dealt with at class. The students' answers showed that their **interests** are not properly addressed, but worst of all was that their answers showed that many of these students had never asked themselves about the topics they would like to discuss or about the

way these topics could be dealt with in the classroom. When they were asked about whether they would like to choose these subject matters in a assembly, a high percentage of them reported they just did not care about that. The development of students' critical sense is one of the firm postulates advocated by both the Aragonese Curriculum and the European Framework of Reference. It was discouraging for us to find out that many of those learners were indifferent to the developments and issues of their own school. A real democratic environment should require and assure an active and critical participation of all its members, we concluded. That is what holistic education should stand for.

As I have repeatedly emphasized, there is still a quite superficial and non-emotional way of dealing with topics. This may be one of the main reasons for the passivity and lack of motivation in the public school. Arnold and Fonseca refer to Scherer's concept of 'stimulus appraisal' as one of the basic pedagogical fundamentals in the second language acquisition:

novelty, pleasantness, the relevance to the individual's needs and goals, the individual's ability to cope with the event, and the compatibility of the event with socio-cultural norms or with the individual's self concept.
(Arnold and Fonseca, 2004, 122)

These should be the main features for an event to become interesting and motivating for learners according to this 'stimulus appraisal' concept. In other words, it is only when the interests of the students are met in class that emotion starts working at the service of the brain and 'magical things' happen. I witnessed one of these magical things in my Vocational Training class. One of my students used to behave as a perfect chameleon, completely melting with the desk so as to go unnoticed by the teacher. In one occasion, Claire, the native assistant, did a reading on the Titanic. The student in question started talking on the issue with a more than acceptable level of proficiency; she was able to express her opinion in an eloquent way as well as displaying a passionate discourse on the matter. She had never before spoken in class without being directly asked by her teacher and her attitude towards English had been that of the passive observer with scarce interest in any subject. But she loved Titanic stories

and that gave her the motivation to defeat her fears and insecurities and to speak aloud in English.

Arnold and Fonseca (2004: 125) , following Gardner's theories on multiple intelligences, claim that taking into account the personal talents of the students may enhance the learning of a second language:

...teachers are better able to tap into the areas of personal meaningfulness of their students since they are recognizing the differences inherent in the students and putting individuals with their different ways of learning where they belong, back at the centre of the learning process.

Gardner's theory (1993) brought to my mind the case of a gypsy boy belonging to one of the first years of ESO. He was supposed not to pay attention in any of his classes; he was also reported to cause some disruption by making noises and capriciously moving during the English class. He occupied the last desk in the classroom with the acquiescence of the teacher. I used to watch him carefully in order to decipher how he really felt in class. It was in the third class that I attended as observer, that I found out he was not as intellectually absent as he pretended to be. In fact, he spent the whole English class rapping his knuckles on the back side of his desk following what seemed to be the rhythm of his classmates' English enunciations. It was quite clear to both my Master's partners in class and to me, that that boy was translating the English sentences into some kind of musical language of his own. Gardner has a name for that in his Multiple Intelligences theory; both the musical-rhythmic frame and bodily-kinaesthetic frame seem to define the kind of intellectual abilities that the boy possessed. Gardner refers to these different types of intelligences in his book of reference *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (1993). This theoretical approach implies a learner-based philosophy much in tune with the Aragonese Curriculum orientations. The broad spectrum of students could be better served if their learning styles could be understood and enhanced by an educational system non-biased towards linguistic and logical-quantitative modes of instruction. My colleagues and I agreed that a more musical approach to English would be beneficial for that boy who

seemed to have an inborn capability for rhythm, which is precious for a second language acquisition.

Students are unique beings with many talents to be discovered and as many interests to be met. I could not witness the participation of the students in the selection of topics, being this one of the recommendations of the Curriculum in its pedagogical objectives paragraph. As I have reported before, our **Research Project** dealt with the need for a more learner-centered philosophy. Learners cannot feel addressed or appealed by these shallow topics, which brings about their emotional detachment from the learning process. In sum, they cannot put their emotions at the service of their brains which is the most efficient way for language acquisition, according to neurolinguists. Cognition and emotion should go hand in hand in the English class. As I have already pointed out, I tried strenuously to arouse their interest in the subject. It was clear since the very beginning that it was going to be difficult for me to find the perfect topic or the perfect way to deal with a topic for such a heterogeneous group. Not having time to spend, I thought that the only thing that might attract everyone's interest was *themselves*. The last sessions of my learning unit were entitled under the Latin maxim: *Í Nosce te IpsumÍ*, (know yourself). My students' response to my topic proposal was satisfactory; a text called *Zodiac signs and ideal holidays* would be the excuse to talk about their personalities while refreshing their knowledge on a topic related to their professional field. It really worked well and we all had a great time. Those *lormant* students showed a high level of enthusiasm which was put into practice through partaking and interaction. I asked them whether they agreed or not with those positive or negative traits that defined their personality according to the text and then a spontaneous, natural talk started and lasted till the bell rang. I am sure, they learnt those lexical expressions relating to their personalities in an almost indelible way.

Of course not all my pedagogic initiatives were successful. In my second class, I wanted to taste again the virtues of the task-based language teaching. I had designed an activity in which my students' creativity was required. They would create an ambitious travel agency of their own. They would work in groups so as to choose the

name for this agency, the board management, its placement etc...The task consisted of the elaboration of an ideal holiday plan for four public personalities such as Barack Obama, Enrique Iglesias, Paris Hilton and Eduard Punset. This planning should define the hotel facilities, the destination of the trip, the means of transport etc...Finally, they had to defend their project before the rest of the classmates. My Master partners acted as neutral jury and they displayed colourful posters showing the scores. My partners voted on which they considered the best proposal. Despite my efforts to help them in the process, the result of this task-based experiment was not as good as I expected. The final proposals lacked both originality and enthusiasm. When the class finished, I recalled Stevick's (1980) concept of *learning space*. The author affirms that the trick for the teacher is to provide the right amount of learning space; students will feel *stifled* if there is not enough space but they will feel *lost* if the allotted space is too big. My students were not used to put their creativity into practice and I deduced my task instructions were too vague as well. Next time, I would try to find my way towards that difficult balance that Stevick postulated.

The absence of a proper emotional context in the classroom does not foster **class spirit** either. During my training period I observed a lack of affective ties among the members of the different classrooms we visited. Then I recalled Stevick philosophy: *Success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes on and between people in the classroom* (1980:4). My observations during my training period led me to think that the schoolrooms were composed of individuals who did not emotionally relate to one another. My **final essay** entitled: *Is the English classroom a non-place?* focuses on this *virtuality* of human relationships in the class. How can we expect true communication in the English classroom when the existing relationships among its members are almost merely virtual?. Freire stated that teachers should be able to transform groups into communities of learners. I firmly think educators should commit to this principle. On its part the Curriculum makes explicit reference in its *12th article* to the need of both creating an emotional climate and fostering **cooperative work** in the classroom. In our **Research Project** our students were asked about the way they liked working in class. Most of them reported they preferred working in groups.

Nevertheless, the implementation of activities that promote cooperative work is exceptional in the public school. Teachers justified their non use of this kind of teaching by affirming that it leads to chaos and disorder in the classroom. But in doing so they are overlooking the possibilities that cooperative learning offers for the enhancement of the intrapersonal and interpersonal competences that, according to the Curriculum, must be also developed in the English class.

I do believe cooperative learning improves knowledge acquisition and helps to build class spirit. For that purpose I designed an activity in which they should make groups according to their Zodiac signs. I bore in mind also one of the principles of instructed language learning by R. Ellis (2005) that prays that the opportunity to interact in the L2 is fundamental for the development of proficiency in that language. Basically they had to debate in groups whether they identified or not with those characteristics that defined their sun sign according to a text entitled: *%The Zodiac signs and their ideal holidays+* after the group deliberations on the esoteric issue a quite vivid debate took place; the class became interactive and proactive for the first time. With the whole activity I wanted to refresh their knowledge on their professional field but above all I aimed to promote class spirit by putting a little seed for the creation of emotional ties such as empathy and identification among my students. It was quite rewarding to observe how people were positively surprised at finding they had things in common with some members of the classroom to whom they had never spoken before.

In some way both my **Learning Unit** and my **Research Project** advocate for the **democratic spirit** in the school, which is one of the flags raised by the Curriculum in its first lines, praying that the democratic values will structure the teaching in the public school in a cross-curricular way. In my experience, I perceived a certain reluctance on the part of some teachers to abandon their solitary and safe privileged position on the classroom platform to become just another member of the school family. The class reality seems to contradict again the Curriculum postulates referring that the public school must aim to be a place for democracy. In my view it still resembles a hierarchical system in which students occupy the subordinate positions. This brought to my mind

some of the sociological theories we studied in our first semester. The Bowles and Gintis theory of the Correspondence Principle (1976) states that the main aim of the educational system is to reproduce the work force that adapts to and accepts as legitimate the social class division of the capitalist system. That is to say, there is a correspondence between the school organizational system and the structure of the capitalist society. In accordance with this marxist theory, Freire points out that to achieve a democratic environment, students and teachers should maintain a relationship of mutuality where the latter could leave behind the outdated models of depositor, prescriber or domesticator. But again, students are not endowed with the responsibility and autonomy of citizens in a democracy. Teachers order and they obey, that is the simple truth. As Kumaravadivelu (2012:5) points out:

A classroom, however, does not exist in a sociological vacuum. It is indeed an arena where, as Freirean critical pedagogists relentlessly remind us, historical, political, social, cultural and ideological forces collide in a never-ending struggle for dominance.

During this Master we have been instructed in the importance of **positive reinforcement** as well as the beneficial consequences of the Pygmalion effect in the classroom. Nevertheless I can not say this was the usual practice among most of the teachers. These pedagogical practices are directly related with the concept of perceived confirmation coined by K. Ellis (2000). According to this author the teacher's confirmation is an interactional process by which educators allow the students to know if they are valuable not only as students but also as individuals. The teacher's confirming behaviours are those conducive to students' feeling endorsed and acknowledged as human beings, helping in this way to develop mature and stable personalities among the members of the classroom. These confirmatory actions have been measured by Ellis according to three main parameters: response to students questions and answers, demonstrated interest in students and in their learning and finally with the teaching style. The results prove that educators' confirmation practices promote both cognitive and affective learning in the students. I tried to firmly stick to those confirmatory parameters stated by Ellis in my classes. Confirmatory behaviour and effective

feedback are perfect tools for students' self-assessment and self-regulation, as we learnt in the second semester of this Master course.

These pedagogical practices can also improve and accelerate the learning process. In my opinion, the use of this teaching policy depends not only on the level of awareness among teachers but also on the level of generosity that those educators are willing to implement in their classes. I think that many, but not all, the educators consider that it is not their responsibility to provide incentives for students. In my opinion, teachers should be more generous in the expression of praise and acknowledgement towards their learners. I think these incentives may come in the form of positive reinforcement and praise. In my view teachers have a duty to make students aware of their strengths and to encourage them to use those strengths to the full to achieve the learning goals. This praise of effort and attainment is in my opinion meagrely implemented in the L2 classroom. Unfortunately most of us can recall some teachers whose didactic practices consisted of: frequent reprimands, low expectations made explicit to us and scarce or even non-existent praise. In my opinion the teaching profession is intrinsically connected to philanthropy and consequently educators should encourage, enjoy and praise their students' achievements. And this should be done in a clear and generous way without subterfuges. Or else they should change profession and occupy their precious time with any other less demanding social activities. I did try hard to put into practice this philosophy and I can say it is truly rewarding to watch the happy and astonished look of a student when personally congratulated for his/ her good work at class. They showed the perplexity of someone who is not used to obtaining praise from a teacher. In my personal interviews my students let me know that my praise of their potentialities and strengths was alien to the common practices of most of their educators. I consider this is very unfair to students. Teachers are the experts who have to inform their learners of their capabilities and show them how to improve them. Students have the right to be valued for their capacity of effort, intelligence, good display of interpersonal skills, high degree of autonomy and responsibility, development of critical sense etc...That is what public school stands for. Grading students' cognitive achievements in specific exams has to do less with education and more with an

arbitrary and sterile process of selection leading to social injustice. Praising the efforts and hard work has in my opinion a positive psychological impact on the learners and this leads to motivation for academic and personal improvement as well as to better behaviour.

In my experience, **mistakes policy** still rules in many classrooms of our public school. In fact, students are basically graded in relation to what they do wrong rather than by what they do right. Both grammatical mistakes and inaccuracy mean such a great burden for the students that they withdraw from classroom activities and interaction. Teachers can help reduce their students' performance anxieties by providing multiple opportunities for feedback about their work, and by emphasizing that mistakes are solely part of learning. Educators should emphasize the things that students do right; mistakes are just signs that allow learners to find the ways to improve. I do subscribe to Carol Deweck (2006) approach on teaching. This professor at Stanford University differentiates between two distinct mindsets in learning: the fixed and the growth mindsets. Deweck argues that people with a fixed mindset believe their basic qualities such as intelligence or talent are simply fixed traits; they consider these innate qualities bring about their success and no effort is required. Students with a fixed mindset become easily frustrated because they interpret mistakes as a threat to their fixed but weak self-concept. In a growth mindset students believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through hard work and this allows them not only to accept mistakes as part of the learning process, but also to gladly undertake challenges in learning. After decades of research, Deweck affirms that a growth mindset helps to create passion in learning and resilience in life, both essential elements for great accomplishment. Schools should embrace this philosophy and praise the effort and the development of the process of learning, not solely the good grading results of their students. In the end, the learning process is a path of endeavour and resilience where both students and teachers may thrive.

Finally, I would like to end up my dissertation on this Master experience advocating for **fun in the English class**. In my teaching session with my Vocational Training students,

I tried to break the rules; as my subject topic was *flights and airports* I asked for volunteers who could perform with gestures the safety instructions on an aircraft. They would play the parts of diligent flight assistants. For that purpose, I went to the ubiquitous oriental bazar (*%a chino+*) and equipped them with some car reflective jackets that served as life jackets complemented with toy whistles and straws so as to give them a more realistic and functional appearance; painter masks were used as oxygen masks. Finally some of these generous students came to class dressed in the guise of some prototypical tourist: white socks, sandals and the consuetudinary bermudas; a straw hat and sunglasses completed their funny look. I just wanted to prove that a classroom can also be a place for fun and rehearsal. In this regard, I wrote a **final essay** for DODAAIN subject entitled: *%s the English Classroom a Non-place?+* It attempted to sum up my final reflections on the teaching profession. My essay stated that the English class should never become a non-place. This philosophical concept was coined by Augé and has been the subject of debate for many critics and thinkers. According to this postmodern theory, this term relates to those spaces such as airports, supermarkets, motorways etc...which are products of a globalized world dehumanizing its inhabitants. In my view, the English classroom should never be a non-place but a space for learning, fun and fulfillment for all its members. After all as Rivers (cited in Arnold, 1998: 235) says: *%We are the most fortunate of teachers- all subjects are ours. Whatever (the students) want to communicate about, whatever they want to read about is our subject matter.+Let's stick to this principle and let life enter the English class.*

4-FUTURE PROPOSALS AND CONCLUSIONS

As far as my proposals for this Masters are concerned, I think the **classes in the first semester should have been given in English**. Teachers need not be English philologists with an RP accent. Still, it is quite paradoxical that the first half of a university Master course for future English teachers is held in Spanish; one may wonder, on what authority can our system of education require students in the secondary school to reach a certain level of oral proficiency in English?. This course

should preach with the example; In my opinion, most university teachers and students of any grades should be willing to give and attend classes in the Shakespeare's tongue. On the other hand, **the training period should be longer**, allowing the trainee to have a more active part during the stay in the school-placement. S/he should be given the opportunity to impart more classes because this is mainly what this Master is about.

Classes in this Master course are overcrowded. There is no room for personalized teaching on the part of teachers. Nor are there many opportunities for the students to intervene on a usual basis in class. In truth, this problem is less acute during the second semester due to the fact that students are distributed according to their speciality. Still this second part of the course presents an excessive ratio of students per teacher which allows limited opportunities for students to partake and interact. Nevertheless this deficiency was somehow counterbalanced by the creative expertise of some of our teachers, who used to divide the class into groups, facilitating the implementation and development of oral skills. The Bologna's spirit of personalized teaching seems incompatible with overcrowded classrooms.

The final stage of this Master course has implied a strenuous effort for both teachers and students; the latter are subject to the compulsory class attendance till the very last stages of the course, leaving not enough time to carry out the assignments to be graded. In my view it should not be mandatory for us to attend every student's oral presentation of the didactic units. **Students should attend just a certain number of these presentations** so as to devote their time to complete successfully the final phase of this Master course, which included very demanding tasks and frequent assignments.

Students who happen to be **mothers or fathers should be given the chance to reconcile family and work life in accordance with the law.** In my case, I applied to be admitted in my daughter's school for my training period but my request was denied without further consideration. Moreover this course is an institutional one. Accordingly, **all the schools in town with no exception should be eligible** as placement for the Practicum periods. Needless to say, it would require an important but necessary

organizational effort on the part of the schools' staff and the public workers at university administration. To make my statement clearer, I would like to establish a parallelism with another important institution such as the public health services. In Spanish hospitals, doctors are bound by law to act as teachers for the students and residents who do their training practices or medical residencies at hospitals; it seems contradictory that so few public schools seem willing to host training teachers whereas every public hospital counts with so many doctors in their training periods as prescribed by law.

As for my future proposals for the improvement of the academic standards in teaching, I would think wise that **teachers attended specialized courses on teaching methodology**; they could also receive specific assessment on the legal framework wherein they operate. Most of them are really hard-workers who labor tirelessly to achieve their teaching goals. But in my opinion, they have never been faced with ~~another way of doing things~~. That is why I believe, many of them would appreciate the possibilities that new resources and methodologies can offer for the teaching of English. Myself, I have never studied Pedagogy nor Didactics during my university degree even though teaching is the major professional path in our career. Names such as Krashen, Celce-Murcia, Ellis, Arnold Morgan and many others were unknown for me at the beginning of this Master. In my non-expert opinion, the more teachers know about Pedagogy and didactic matters, the less prone to attrition they become. This specific knowledge helps avoid stagnation in the learning-teaching process. As we have learnt in this Master course, teachers cannot work in isolation. We need the cooperation of other members of the educational community that might offer valuable and different points of view to our daily labour. Teachers cannot be isles in the middle of the rough ocean of the secondary school, rather they should be open and willing to receive the beneficial influence of new knowledge carried on a constant, mellifluous breeze.

Another important pedagogical issue that should be reinforced at secondary school, is the **learning to learn competence**. It has been profusely cited in every official document since the implementation of the Bologna Plan. It seems contradictory then,

that no special emphasis is put on the teaching of learning methodologies for students at any academic level: ESO, Bachillerato, University students, etc...In my opinion paying attention to the learning to learn competence would bring a qualitative change to the educational system; it would mean the evolution from the traditional learning practices, which relied on memorization, to the modern democratic ones, which provide students with the+right+to think, to reflect and to learn for themselves. Teachers should act just as facilitators of learning whereas students should be able to create their own learning path with responsibility and autonomy.

Much effort and money are invested every year by the government in power to improve the studentsqproficiency in English. Still, a radical change is needed and this means a change of mentality and approach towards English. In my view the subject of English is viewed in a condescending way. In other words, there seems to be a kind of unwritten rule saying that any attempts made to enhance the teaching of English will ultimately prove futile. Our educational system seems to be resigned to occupy the last positions of the European ladder in terms of proficiency in English. In my view **the Pygmalion effect should also apply to the official institutions of education**, which should rely on the potentialities of its students. On the other hand this little consideration of the English subject might have to do with a utilitarian conception of education that is still present in our culture; Maths and Language instruction still receive the highest blessing and considerations from the competent authorities with jurisdiction in this matters, whereas the other subjects of the curriculum are relegated to a secondary position.

As I have said before, **the Aragonese Curriculum allows the implementation of new methodologies** that permit a radical change in the teaching of English. But, as the title of our investigation research prays, this pedagogical decalogue is still not well known by many of the members of the educational family. **Thus, there should be a wide dissemination and diffusion of its postulates.** In my opinion this would be beneficial both for teachers and students. Scholars and experts should train teachers on integrating new methodologies and new teaching approaches inside the classroom. This would empower teachers with a new knowledge that would result in the

optimization of their time and efforts. In my view, the Aragonese Curriculum has a progressive spirit whereas the educational community shows a certain resistance to change. The implementation of new didactic methods may combat the long-term exhaustion and diminished interest that some educators suffer throughout their teaching careers. The learner-centered methodology advocated by the Curriculum, attempts to bestow both commitment and authority on students; in this way teachers can share with those learners the responsibility of their learning process. The constant updating in new methods and methodologies may be a powerful weapon against attrition among the teaching profession.

Teachers should reflect also on their personal philosophy on education. They should dare put in question their values, preconceptions, beliefs and prejudices. In doing so, teachers should be ductile enough so as to move with the times and not to lag behind in terms of new practices and methodologies. In sum, they should be self-critical regarding the nature and purpose of the teaching profession so as not to be outdated in a world of constant change. Educators should embrace this challenge of constant renewal that being in contact with young generations offers them. For this purpose, teachers should practice self-assessment following the **European Portfolio for Students Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)**, which provides a useful rubric for professional introspection allowing to know your weaknesses and strengths as educator. As Freire and Dewey have postulated, an educator can never be neutral; teachers must take a coherent personal stance on teaching.

There should be a constant evaluation and assessment of the students progress throughout the years. The learning of a second language is a gradual process and should be measured accordingly. In this way individual reports made on the students' development should be a common tool for proving the effectiveness of the English teaching. Some sort of specialized evaluation should be undertaken at the beginning of the course so as to establish the point of departure of every student. In this attempt for a constant assessment, teachers of the English subject should meet at the beginning of the academic year so as to exchange precise information about every student's

performance and progress during the previous course. The development of a second language proficiency cannot be measured according to isolated exams and standardized evaluations. In consequence, there should be a more accurate way of measuring the students' progress so as to avoid stagnation. Thus, learners with a high level of proficiency may come down to the inferior level of their peers if there is not a sort of demand for excellence on them. Whereas learners with limited proficiency, when correctly challenged, can reach the superior level of their classmates. The risk of stagnation is high in the public school when students are only grouped according to age criteria. **Students should be grouped regarding their knowledge or proficiency on the subject matter**; the use of the age criterium has become obsolete.

I would also dare propose **a change in the University Entrance Exam**. On the one hand, there are no oral exams revealing the communicative skills of the learner and on the other hand the pragmatic and procedural competences are not evaluated, contrary to the Curriculum stipulations. I have been studying the Selectivity exams of the last years and they are including some sort of creative writing exercise, but overall, these tests still seem to be a kind of olympiad of syntactic inversions and paraphrasing. In my view the implementation of an oral test in the selectivity exam would bring about a substantial improvement in the students' communication skills. In this way, classes of English would effectively address the needs for oral skills improvement. The need for the improvement of the oral skills must be created from the competent institutions.

I would like to add a humorous comment on **textbooks**. Since many teachers will probably continue making use of these books, I would propose that the script-writers of popular tv-shows were consulted for the elaboration of such texts; in fact, these writers weekly achieve to rouse the attention of an audience of mostly young teenagers. In this way the interest and motivation required in the students' process of language acquisition would be assured. The topics offered by these textbooks would theoretically favour interaction as well as the development of oral skills, as they would accurately appeal to the students' tastes and interests. Needless to say, the prototypical

shallowness of these scripts should be permeated by the **philanthropic spirit of Freire's philosophy** or the like.

EPILOGUE

Allow me to conclude by making some literary digression on the educational issue. Although much progress has been made in education in the last decades, there are still some remnants of the Utilitarian philosophy in today's classrooms that seem to deprive education of a more humanistic approach. In my opinion, the Aragonese Curriculum would allow a change in the system if its didactic orientations did not remain only on paper.

I would like to dissert on two literary examples that epitomize the old way of teaching: on the one hand Dickens's *Hard Times* and on the other hand Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both works depict classrooms where students must just obey and memorize. Moreover, there is a strict division of powers in which teachers occupy the hegemonic position whereas students remain in the background of subordination and obedience. The world in which Sissy Jupe and Stephen Dedalus live is ruled by FACTS, being these irrefutable facts a law that must be observed without questioning. Dedalus must simply memorize the Latin declensions with neither hesitations nor mistakes, whereas Sissy Jupe must define a horse in a scientific manner (quadruped, mammal, etc...) leaving no room for feelings or imagination. Imagination is statutorily prevented in these classrooms because of its lack of utility. Imagination and fancy are forbidden in such an educational system whose disciples are instructed on the postulates of Empiricism and Logic. Education was not more than instruction in facts and indoctrination in those not-so-distant times.

In my view, imagination could stand for democracy and personal autonomy in the classrooms of today. Democracy implies not only the respect for individual rights but also the guarantee of potential individual realization. And that is what our educational system should enhance and pursue. In other words, learners should give its students their democratic status that enables them to fully develop as individuals. In a democracy

students should thrive in a rich environment where they could freely experience and interact. Thus, 21st century Aragonese education is still making its way towards a fertile territory for personal freedom and democratic education. **Students must have the right to gain a voice of their own** and an active participation in their personal process of learning. In other words, the pursuit of the learners' autonomy in the classroom runs parallel to the pursuit of democracy in education.

By enabling students to develop their autonomy and their capabilities in the learning process, we are empowering learners to actively participate in our society, and thus we are contributing to the fluent continuation of democracy. Finally, the pursuit of competence and self-determination should be a common goal for both learners and educators. Ultimately, the best teaching policy of all is the one that enhances students' acknowledgement on the value of conscientious work and personal endeavour. In my opinion, success can only come with honest, hard work.

As a former philologist, I would like to end up my dissertation by examining the etymology of the protagonists of both *Hard Times* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The name of Sissy is the acronym for Cecilia which means 'blind' in Latin. The name of Stephen refers to the Catholic martyr whereas his surname, Dedalus, makes allusion to the mythical architect able to make wings that allowed his son to fly. I would like to conclude by saying that, **as future teachers, we should be able to help students keep their eyes open to life and their wings ready to fly.**

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